cloned child and the mother. Animal studies on reproductive cloning show a high incidence of fetal disorders and spontaneous abortions, and malformation and death among newborns. There is no reason to suppose that the outcome would be different in humans," says May.

The birth of Dolly the sheep in 1996, cloned from a cell from the mammary gland of another sheep, raised hopes of growing heart or nervous tissue to treat coronary or neurodegenerative diseases.

But the 16,000 scientists represented by 63 academies believe that nations should make up their own minds on whether research should be allowed on embryo-derived stem cells. "Opinions on the ethics of therapeutic cloning in different countries are divided. It would be a tragedy if we allowed disagreements on therapeutic cloning to jeopardize a convention that could ensure that human reproductive cloning is outlawed across the globe and protect vulnerable people from unscrupulous individuals," says May. "A UN convention will put pressure on countries to pass legislation banning this unsafe and unethical practice. Policy on therapeutic cloning should be excluded from the UN convention and determined at national level."

Richard Gardner, chair of the Royal Society's recent studies into stem cell research said that the society urged "all other nations, particularly the United States, to introduce and support appropriate regulations that would create a worldwide moratorium on human reproductive cloning, regardless of whether it is funded publicly or privately."

In the US, despite some breakthroughs, research on human-derived stem cells has been handicapped by the President's decision two years ago to allow work only on stem cell lines developed earlier. Scientists have testified before Congress that research is still all but paralysed in this area because of the government's decision.

Fungal familiarities

Fungi represent one of the most abundant but least known groups of organisms on the planet. The number of species can be more than an order of magnitude greater than other conspicuous multi-celled organisms. Britain, with 50 or so species of butterfly and 400 species of birds is estimated to be home to around 12,000 species of fungi. The range of species and their environmental and other significance is only slowly being fully realised.

One of the problems is that many species lack a common name so that their presence or absence in particular situations goes unnoticed. In many countries, edible species carry common names and are actively sought by collectors. Their activities ensure that species are monitored and any changes in abundance do not go unobserved.

But Britain has no tradition of collecting fungi beyond a single field mushroom species, in spite of the abundance of other edible species.The lack of a name is not confined to rare, obscure or microscopic fungi; many groups with large, colourful fruiting bodies have no name other than the Linnaean Latin one given to them by keen mycologists over the years.

But a new project, backed by the British Mycological Society, has, over several years, come up with a list of English names for more than 1,000 species of the most commonly recorded fungi. The society first tackled the issue in the 1960s with the production of a list of 200 names for fungi, over half of which are still in use today. The new list includes both edible and poisonous species, as well as those of conservation concern.

The hope is that the new names will help people who find the Latin names off-putting to spot fungi. But in a nod to Linnaeus, each genus has a suggested common second English name so that, for example, all the *Russula* species are called Xxx Brittlegill. Exceptions are those species where a common name is now in common use. The society hopes the new common names will help raise awareness of this important group of organisms. And it surely has had fun introducing words such as 'disco', 'caterpillarclub', 'jellybaby' and 'woodwax' into the fungal vocabulary.

Naming game: Fruiting bodies of the fungus *Russula fellea*, now known as the Geranium Brittlegill. (Photograph: Oxford Scientific Films.)